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OF RESEARCH BOOKS.

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THE POVERTY OF AMERICAN LIBRARIES IN THE MATTER OF
RESEARCH BOOKS.

By Ernest C. Richardson.

Already in 1905 it had been for a good many years evident to research workers, and those who are charged with furnishing them the means of research, that our American libraries, in spite of their wonderful growth on the educational side, through the popular libraries, was so deficient in research books as to make it a serious problem to the average college professor, who, in a majority of the lines of research, was obliged to go abroad for study in foreign libraries, not only in lines requiring manuscripts and unique books, but in lines requiring books easily purchasable at a small price. In this year the matter had become so acute that the writer of this paper made it a leading part of the Presidential Address at the American Library Association meeting at Portland, Oregon. In this address he gave an analysis of the situation regarding some 1,700 periodicals of research value. He had at that time also collected some curiously interesting statistics, not introduced into the address, concerning individual narrow lines of research--e. g., the fact that no copy of the only two critical biographies of the most popular writer of the Middle Ages could be found in any American library, and not a tithe of the books referred to in the footnotes of these critical biographies.

Five years later the subject was brought sharply home to the writer again while acting as Chairman of the Bibliographical Committee of the American Historical Association, and in the matter of the great collections on European History, most frequently referred to in historical writings. This resulted in getting out a rough joint list of such collections, and in the preface to this was a study of the situation as regards these typical most-needed source books.

Five years later still, when the American Library Institute took up an active crusade in behalf of the research interests of American libraries, this subject was again attacked through a group of papers and discussions,

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introduced by Dr. C. W. Andrews, of the John Crerar Library, on the aspect of coöperation, and again the following year a group of locating research material. Both of these were more concerned with the problem of making available what we already have than the problem of improving the national stock, but both recognized the fact that the same machinery which is to be used for making available what we have is the best machinery for economical coöperation in adding to the national stock. The 1918-19 meetings took up the same topic in relation to the European war, and in 1919 Dr. Carlton, of the Newberry Library, in his Presidential Address, made a very significant contribution to the topic in asking "What, during the period of reconstruction which lies before us, are the chief duties of those American institutions which minister to the needs and interests of scholarship, of the higher learning, of research and original investigation?"

He answers this by calling attention to the weariness and exhaustion of European nations, and the responsibility of American scholars for keeping the lamp of learning lighted. "We must," he says, "find the means and the materials whereby constructive scholarship and material investigation may be maintained at least to the levels attained in Europe prior to the war." "Here," he says, "is a path for our reconstruction, grave and weighty in its responsibilities, but noble and inspiring in its opportunities. The whole problem of research is involved in it."

He calls attention to the fact of the poverty of our research collections. He says: "It is, I believe, no secret that during the past two years some of us have failed rather dismally when requests for research material have come to us on behalf of our government, whose experts required such material for use at the Peace Conference. A surprising number of our largest libraries have, I am told, been found seriously deficient in the literature of many of the principal historical, legal, ethnological, and economic subjects now being studied at Paris."

He goes on to say that "We shall not be able to fulfil our full duties to scholarship and learning until we have developed in this country research collections comparable in depth and breadth and careful upbuilding to those in the great European centres of learning."

He makes appeal for a "studied policy of book acquisition" as the only policy which will create collections adequate for research and increase of knowledge, and in conclusion appeals for ever-increasing provision of the materials for research and aids for research.

This indicates well the problem with which the war sets us face to face.

What Dr. Carlton says about the failure of our research material is taken

up interestingly by Mr. Keogh, in the August Library Journal, in an article on the work of the House Inquiry Commission, afterwards merged in the American Commission to negotiate peace at Paris. Several accounts of this work have been published in the life of Colonel House, in various authorized public statements, as well as in Mr. Keogh's paper. It involved the work of a large number of collaborators and a very much larger number of affiliated scholars, aiding the direct research matters. It covered all countries and topics likely to be practically touched on in the Peace Conference, as recited in interesting, if prudent, detail by Mr. Keogh. As collaborator for the Inquiry, the writer of this paper was consulted in an expert way by Dr. Simkhovitch, the bibliographical expert of the commission, after Mr. Keogh had severed his connection owing to pressing university duties, for the active gathering and organizing of the collection of books to be taken over, and has had occasion, therefore, to cross-check Mr. Keogh's observation as to the "regrettable condition of our scholarly libraries" in the unusual books on ordinary subjects and the best books on unusual subjects. Especially in the last crowded weeks after the armistice, when serious effort was being made to get the books applied for by the twenty-two experts who were going over with the material, the realization was ground in. It is impracticable to go into detail of these things at this time, but the whole matter in a nutshell is illustrated by one brief and pointed true story suggested by one of the very topics to which Mr. Keogh refers. A list of books was received at the Inquiry library one day containing forty titles on this topic wanted by an expert working at Harvard, who had exhausted the resources of the Harvard Library. This list was sent out to the usual round of seven or eight libraries most likely to have these books, and as I happened to be going to Princeton myself that day, for the day, I took an interest in seeing how we came out in the matter, and learned with chagrin that we did not have a single one of the titles. On mentioning this a few days later to the assistant in charge at the Inquiry, I was told that we need not be so very much troubled about it, as not one of the other libraries had so much as one of them! This was exceptional, but there were a lot of things coming so close to it as to make one sit up and take notice. There is no use in blinking the fact that in many questions of the utmost importance for permanent international relations the state of our material is nothing better. This is true, as we all know and as has been said, both of the primary material in the unusual fields and of the second line of material in familiar fields. The fact is that the research material in this country is rich in the common places and the duplicates manifold. It is also true that the country is

incredibly rich in books for general education—a class of books becoming less valuable for use every year. It is farther true that it is becoming incredibly rich in rare and unique books, but in that very substantial class of books which are of permanent value in research work, as primary or secondary sources, and whose numbers reach into the millions, we are still poor, very poor. There are probably at least a couple of million inexpensive books of real usefulness which we do not have in this country.

It also remains true of what has been said over and over again in our associations and in the Institute for the last year—that the remedy is simple. It means joint lists and central organizing for the taking of copies and for the securing of proper geographical distribution. The only thing lacking is doing it.

The real cause of this research situation is, of course, the fact that our remoteness from the ordinary sources had not developed a school of research workers, and this largely because research required so much expensive travel. This is no longer true, as was shown by the work for the Peace Conference, in which it has been alleged that something like 400 research workers were more or less involved. This, moreover, started up things with such an impetus in matters of historical research that the condition will never be the same again. What is true of historical research was also true of engineering research, chemical research, economic research, and is proving true also even of research in religion. It is a new era to be met in the American universities, and it should be met with some adequate grasp and the organized effort to get all elements into coöperative effort. It is significant that the preamble to the covenants of the league of nations puts coöperation to the forefront. It is the watchword today.

The reason why we have lagged in the matter of research books is thus, at bottom, because we have not realized the need of them. The average librarian has been very impatient of those librarians who purchased books whose usefulness was not recognized by the average man. Our eyes have been fixed on what some call the “high lights” and others the “common places” of literature—the best books on each subject. Librarians have been rightly aiming, with limited funds, to get the best books for all needs, and perhaps for the individual institution this has been the best, but for national welfare it has not been enough. Every library should not only contribute to the high lights, the best books, the common place books on the common place subjects, but make its practical contribution to the nation's resources in the outlying fields. We are surfeited with the common place book.

Several moves have recently been made towards a practical coöperation in this matter, and if it is not taken up in a broader way it is likely to be taken up by an informal group of a few interested university libraries, not altogether as a university library matter, but one for the attention of the financial and efficiency authorities in the institution. It has been brought to the attention of the Executive Committee of the Association of American Universities in the same spirit. The matter has lagged too long waiting for initiative of the great research endowments or the general research libraries. It contains too wide possibilities of economy and multiplied efficiency to be longer neglected. It must be done, and it ought to be done on a wide enough plan to secure that within the next few years there shall be copies of all easily purchasable books which may be needed for research in any department in some known spot in some American library, and, in general, enough copies and so arranged geographically that time taken in borrowing shall not be excessive.

Following are reprints of the analyses of 1905 and 1911:

Extract from Presidential Address, A. L. A., 1905.

The Adequacy of American Libraries as Regards Their Books.

The library problem in whatever locality is always a double one; on the one hand there is the library in its aid to the search for new ideas, on the other the library helping in the diffusion of common knowledge; on the one hand the scientific reference library, and on the other the popular circulating library. The problem of the one is to furnish to the men who are advancing knowledge, whether in science or medicine, theology or trade, all the books that will help them in their task; and of the other, to tempt the multitude to read readable books.

In considering our national problem at this time it was the intention of this conference and it is the intention of this introductory paper to lay first stress on the work of the libraries and the library association in the promotion of that common knowledge which is necessary to make men good citizens, the library as a factor in popular education. This very fact, however, calls for some attention at this time to the scientific side, and the propriety of this has been emphasized by a request from the college libraries of the Pacific coast to have their needs kept in mind at this conference. Let us consider, therefore, for a little the national library problem of the reference library at the present time, and this concerns:

When President Gilman was preparing plans for the Carnegie Institution at Washington he expressed the opinion that the problem of American scholarship, so far as books and libraries were concerned, was pretty well settled. We are now so well provided with books, he said, that in one library or another we can get about everything that we need, and we can now afford to turn our attention to other matters. This was so contrary to the experience of many librarians and scholars, and yet so precisely expressed the attitude of many institutions at the present day, that it provoked a more systematic observation on several lines, as to what the actual resources of our American libraries are.

This inquiry conveniently divided itself into a study of our total resources and of their distribution over this wide land of ours. And first let us guard ourselves by saying that it would be misleading to imply that the total resources of this country in the matter of books were insignificant. On the contrary, the remarkable growth of actual resources of the country through such libraries as those of Harvard University, the Library of Congress, the Boston and New York Public Libraries, the John Crerar and the Newberry Libraries, and many other college, reference and special libraries, is a matter of just pride, but whether these are adequate is another matter.

Being in position to examine a list of some seventeen hundred periodicals current about the year 1900, and to which actual bibliographical references in a certain line of work had been gathered, I have taken occasion to study these with reference to this subject.

The list is not a miscellaneous one, but is one of actual references gathered which the user is trying to verify by referring to the periodicals themselves. There are, as most of you know, joint lists of the periodicals in the libraries of Boston and vicinity, including Harvard, of Chicago and vicinity, of Washington, and of California, all up to date of 1900 or later. Moreover, there is an older list of periodicals, but not of transactions, in New York, and, besides this, joint lists of many important classes in New York up to recent dates published in the Bulletin of the New York Public Library. Checking up in these various sources, and comparing with the Astor Library catalogue as well, some interesting results appear. These are, of course, subject to such corrections and liable to such error as such statistics must be, but in their general line they represent faithfully the real state of things as to the adequacy of our American libraries.

Eliminating the duplicate, doubtful, and those with incomplete comparative data, there remained a list of 1,216 substantial series, perhaps one-third historical, one-third theological and philosophical, and the remainder scat-

tered over the whole field, but chiefly in philology, literature, political and economic science. Four hundred and seventy-eight of these series cannot be found in any of the above sources. In other words, 40 per cent. of these series, containing actual bibliographical references which an actual investigator is trying to verify, cannot be found by him readily anywhere in the United States.

There is no doubt that our resources have grown greatly, but so long as it remains true that a California student must go 6,000 miles for 45 per cent. of the works actually wanted on the subject, and 3,000 miles for 25 per cent. more, only finding 30 per cent. anywhere on the Pacific slope, the library resources of the country cannot be looked upon with complacency as adequate.

Moreover, among these 370 periodicals not to be found in the California libraries, but found somewhere in the East, there are no less than 40 of which there are six or more copies in the eastern libraries, and of which there is not one copy in the California libraries. The average among these 40 is nine, and among them there is one with 17, one with 15, one with 13, three with 12, and three with 11 copies, while the Pacific coast is without a single copy. Chicago, for example, often has two or three or more copies of a periodical which is not to be found in California, while at the same time it lacks 114 periodicals which some one other locality east or west has, and 478 which no library in the United States seems to have.

These figures show that, splendid as is the progress of our great libraries in the supply of books, we lack at these points:

1. In our grand total we lack 40 to 67 per cent. of a minimum total of books needed and published abroad.
2. The distribution of our books is such that one locality may have a dozen copies of a volume, while another has none at all.

A remedy for this state of things does not lie in having each of the great libraries start up and buy these 478 periodicals now as fast as they have opportunity. This sort of thing we have been doing a great deal of, and the net result is that only a small portion is gotten, for which we have paid much more than it was necessary, and which are distributed by accident, so that there may be several copies at one centre and none in any of the others.

The remedy lies rather:

- 1st. In coöperation in purchase and distribution. By this is meant, not the actual pooling and buying by a single agent, but the distribution, by agreement among the libraries, of the important works which shall be acquired by each, so that not more than one or two copies of the less used

works shall be purchased in each locality. In many cases a single copy in the Library of Congress would be enough. It would be a comparatively small matter to distribute 500 or 1,000 series among the libraries of any one locality in such a way that the burden of seeing that they were all accessible should not be very great. It is a simple, common-sense matter of coöperation, which calls for only a little forethought and reasonable application of the principle of community of interest.

2d. Cheapening of the postal rates would be one of the very best means for relieving the acuteness of the problem of the scholar in the United States.

It is a matter of frequent observation to the student working abroad that the moderate postal charges, in Germany, for example, make it possible to get the books, which do not happen to be in a single centre, at a moderate expense.

Our problem in the United States in this direction is such that a reducing of our postal rates would be of still greater use, and would go far to help the student's serious problem.

3d. At the basis of either coöperative purchase, coöperative distribution, or the use by the student in one locality of books in another, by use of the mails, lies, of course, the coöperative list.

After thirty years' experience in libraries, and a recent extensive experience of existing coöperative catalogues of periodicals in this country and abroad, I have no hesitation in saying that there is no point in library practice where capital and organization could be so profitably applied to an economical solution of our national library problem of an adequate book supply as in the immediate and considerable extension of the coöperative book list.

Extract from the Preface to a Union List of Collections on European History in American Libraries, 1912.

This trial edition of a union list of sets of collected works by various authors on European History is in effect an exhibit to the report of the Committee on Bibliography of the American Historical Association, and is published for the committee.

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How nearly impossible it is to make even a fairly accurate edition of a work of this sort on the bibliographical side at this time will be readily seen from the facts stated in the report of the committee in 1911 that there were then some 300 out of the 2,197 works mentioned that could not be found in this country at all, and nearly 1,000 sets which could be examined at first

hand only by going to very scattered and distant points. On the other hand, this is perhaps the most intricate of all classes of entry matter to handle without referring to the books themselves—periodicals, even, hardly being excepted.

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The thanks of the committee and of all historical students are due to the libraries which have so cordially coöperated. The considerable amount of work implied on the part of each coöperating library naturally made some hesitate at first and until the meaning and usefulness to both libraries and historical students was fully explained and understood, but the universally cordial and even enthusiastic response, after the matter was understood, has been most gratifying.

The check list was sent out last year (1911) and the results compiled and presented as a report at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association at Buffalo in December of that year. Some of the figures and inferences of this report will be found following this preface. The check list, uncorrected as to bars, but with indication of location of copies added, as in the present edition, was issued in March as a proof edition.

The main objects served by such a check list are: (1) Guidance of research students to the places where they can consult needed books, (2) facilitation of inter-library loans, and (3) service as purchase list by showing librarians and historical students just the points which most need strengthening. The amount of use of this list on the first two counts could be judged by experience, but as to the third matter there was not much experience from which to judge.

It was the hope of the committee that the circulation of the list would result at least in somewhat strengthening the apparatus for historical work in American libraries, but the prompt and large response went beyond their utmost expectations. Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and the Library of Congress have perhaps been most active in supplying their lacks, but the greatest public libraries and many of the university libraries, especially libraries about Chicago, have been alert, with the results that several thousand additional copies are indicated in this edition, the total number of copies which cannot be consulted in America has been reduced, and the general situation in several geographical localities has been distinctly improved. In the report of last year, Harvard, with 1,267 out of 2,197 sets, had already a considerably larger number than the Library of Congress, its nearest runner up. At once, on the issue of the check list in January, 1911, it began purchasing new sets, and, after the report in December, it con-

tinued the careful searching of its libraries for copies, so that before issuance of the proof edition in March of this year (1912) it had sent in additional titles, bringing the number of its sets up to about 1,600. Since that time some 300 more sets have been added, so that, at the present time, Harvard alone has more titles than there were altogether in all American libraries at the time of the report a year ago. It now lacks less than 300 sets, while it was reported a year ago that there were 313 sets which were not to be found anywhere in this country. Yale, too, has very greatly increased the number of sets reported over the number reported last year.

The most significant fact of the statistics of last year remains, however, substantially unchanged—the fact that **only ten or a dozen libraries have as many as 10 per cent. of the collections, and that, out of 786 institutions which profess to do work of college grade, only about fifty libraries have as much as 1 per cent.** The actual situation is even much worse than appears from the figures, since two or three inexpensive volumes of illustrative source books for class-room use are in the list through inadvertance, and undoubtedly swell the record of the minor institutions. It is safe to say that a majority even of the institutions included in the Babcock list have less than one-tenth of 1 per cent. of these sets, and yet these are titles which have been gathered from actual references and are the books which are liable to meet any men engaged in historical research at every turn.

The moral drawn from this last December as to the **need of some organized coöperation** to meet the want, which cannot by any possibility be met individually by each library, has become even more pointed by the experience of the year, and especially by the rapidly growing prices of the more useful and scarcer sets here listed.

The problem of the distribution of the burden of lending in the inter-library loan system has also been increased by the list in direct proportion as it is used. The list itself, however, affords a certain means of relief, and the committee feels that it owes to Harvard, Yale, Columbia, the Library of Congress, the University of Pennsylvania, Cornell, and the other large libraries which have so freely contributed in the inter-library loan system, to urge on historical students borrowing from other libraries that they borrow always, so far as possible, when using out of this list, from the smaller libraries whenever they are shown to have copies. Some of the libraries, like the New York Public, cannot lend out, and in many cases the larger libraries ought not to lend many of the sets here indicated, even out of their library building, as they are so likely to be called on at any moment for use in verifications, if not for research use. It is, in fact, in the interest

of scholarship that some one large library in every geographical centre should make its collection as nearly complete as possible, and not lend out at all (except duplicates), although it is to be greatly hoped that, while the present poverty of our libraries in research books continues, a liberal policy may prevail as to the large class of books of which the probable local use is only very occasional, on terms, of course, requiring instant return in case of need.

It becomes pretty clear that a thorough practical solution of the present problem for historical students involves: (1) Better knowledge of the location of books that we already have, (2) better geographical distribution of those that shall be purchased, and (3) cheaper transportation of books. The ideal solution would be the provision of the Library of Congress with means to systematically provide five depository centres, each with a reference copy and lending copy of all the more important books not otherwise provided for in these centres and extending the franking privilege of transportation. Something less than this, however, might certainly be reached by organized coöperation among the groups of libraries as they now stand.

Ninety-four libraries coöperate in this list, and these include nearly all libraries of the first and second importance in this particular line, as well as quite a number which have taken the pains to coöperate, but which contribute only two or three titles each. A very few libraries of importance, through difficulty of their cataloguing situation or some inadvertence, as on the part of the University of Wisconsin, are not included in the trial edition, but will, it is hoped, be included in the revised edition, if it is published. The names of the libraries are arranged geographically under the titles in groups which correspond to those used by the United States Bureau of Education, except for splitting the North Atlantic Division and putting adjoining Canadian libraries with the respective groups, as follows: (1) New England, (2) Middle States, (3) South Atlantic Division, (4) South Central Division, (5) North Central Division, (6) Western Division. They are arranged alphabetically under the groups.

Extracts from the Report of the Committee on Bibliography of the American Historical Association, December, 1911.

This check list contains the titles of 2,197 collections on European history, comprising about 25,000 volumes. It was sent out to 305 libraries—distributed as follows: Eastern section 86, Middle 77, South Atlantic 24, South

Central 11, North Central 83, Western 24. All these libraries contain over 30,000 volumes each.

Answers were received from 162 libraries, of which 83 libraries sent check lists, as follows: Eastern section 22, Middle 26, South Atlantic 6, North Atlantic 22, Western 7. The South Central section did not report any copies.

Eighty-three libraries are thus represented in the edition as prepared. Of these, **only one has as many as half the collections**, 16 have less than five sets each, 26 have less than one-half of one per cent., 33 less than one per cent., 56 less than two per cent., 64 less than five per cent., 74 less than ten per cent., leaving thus only nine libraries of the 83 with more than ten per cent., or 220 out of the 2,200 collections. These nine will, however, undoubtedly be increased to twelve when delayed returns from five others are received.

Although 1,884 collections are to be found in one or another of these 83 libraries, 437 can be found each only in one library, 328 in two libraries, 232 in three, 200 in four, 153 in five, and 90 in six. Three hundred and eighty-one works are to be found each in from seven to 20 libraries, 39 in from 20 to 40 libraries, and four in 40 or more libraries; one being in 43, one in 47, one in 51, and one in 61 libraries.

In the matter of quantity, thus, it appears that on an average the libraries reporting contain about one in 20 of the sets, but excluding the nine or twelve largest, the remaining large libraries of this country contain, each, but one in 50. The smallest deficiency of any library is 930 out of 2,197 sets, and 313 are not found in any library.

It is clear from this situation that no library is self-sufficient—even Harvard lacking 930 sets, and all but twelve lacking on the average 2,153 out of 2,197 works. Even as good colleges as Amherst and Williams, having but 26 and 17, respectively, lack 2,171 and 2,180, respectively, out of 2,197, while probably 700 of the 786 institutions doing work of college grade in the United States are worse off than these.

On the other hand, however, it is equally clear that these libraries are by way of being able to do a good deal to help one another. Altogether these libraries supply 1,884 sets. Even Harvard can thus find 617 of her 930 lacking sets somewhere in America. Harvard is thus by way of lending 1,267 sets and borrowing 617 sets, the Library of Congress of lending 917 and borrowing 913, and all others need to borrow more than they can lend. This fact has laid a pretty heavy burden on Harvard in the past, but with the use of such lists as this she should in the future be able to put off much of the burden on smaller libraries.

Adding estimates for the five other libraries gives in round numbers a

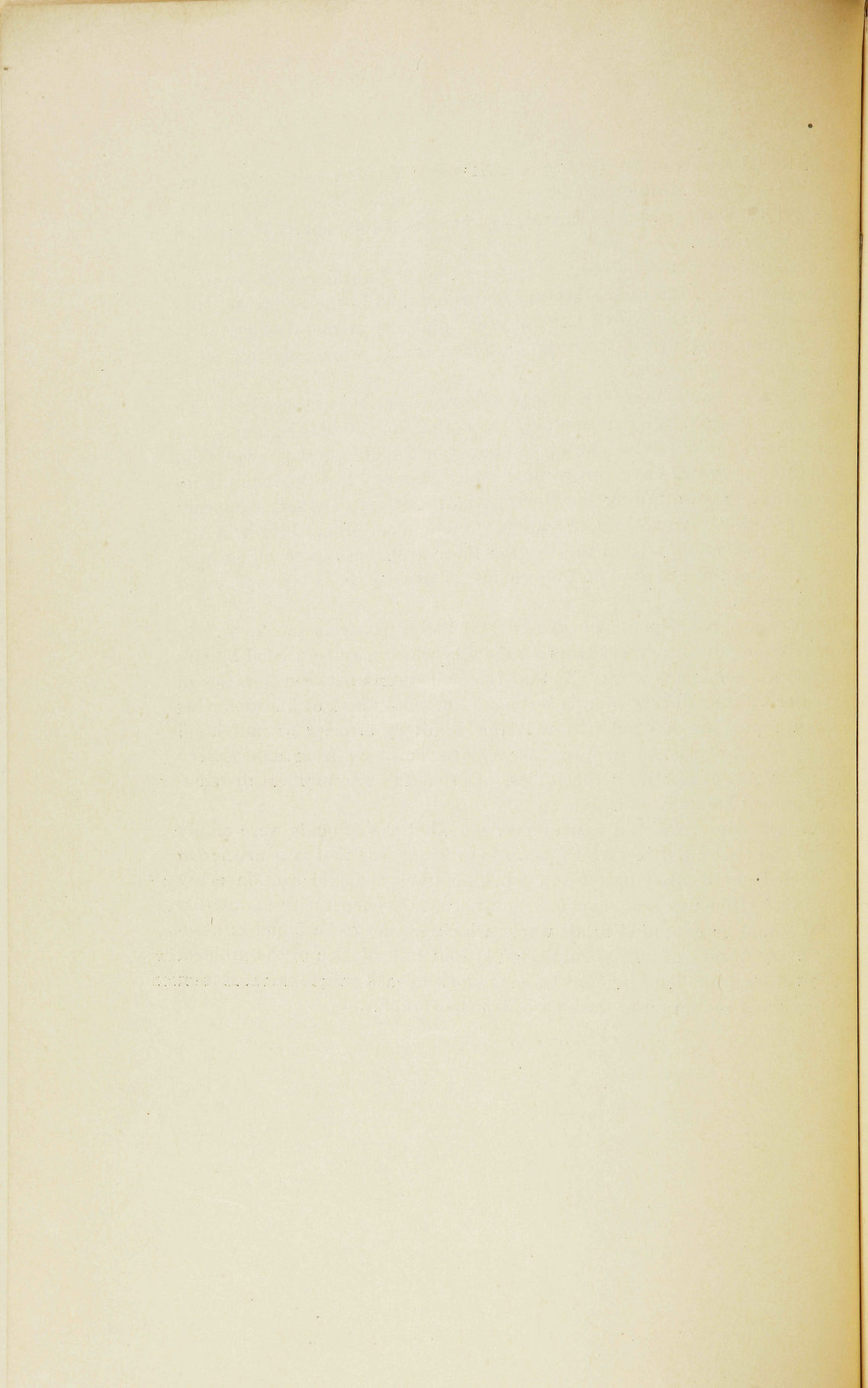
total of 10,700 copies in 88 libraries, distributed: Eastern section, 22 libraries, 3,250 copies; Middle, 28 libraries, 4,100 copies; South Atlantic, 6 libraries, 1,060 copies; North Central, 24 libraries, 1,750 copies; Western, 8 libraries, 540 copies.

Analyzing a little more closely, it appears that 267 works can be found in New England only, 126 in the Middle States only, 90 in the South Atlantic section only, six in the North Central only, and one in the Western only. New England must draw on other sections for 221 works and all other sections draw on it for 267.

On the other hand, however, in some cases where there is want in one section there is superfluity in another. New England has, for example, two or three copies each of 39 works which cannot be found in any other section, and the Middle States have two to four copies each of 12 works found in no other section. Again, taking the North Atlantic States together, it appears that there are 348 works which can be found in no other section of the country, but of which within this section there are from two to nine copies each, 65 having three copies, 55 four copies, 25 five copies, 11 six copies, and 11 seven copies.

The practical problem which caused this list starts from the facts: (1) That no American library contains all the sets which may be needed by any historical worker in his work, (2) that the coöperation between libraries in the matter of inter-library loan is seriously limited by lack of knowledge as to where copies are located, (3) that the desultory attempt of individual libraries to supply lacks by purchase results in waste from unnecessary duplication and competition for copies, (4) that the geographical distribution of present books is bad.

The conclusions from the figures are: (1) That the grounds were amply justified and that a list in fact helps on each count, (2) that it is neither to be expected nor desired that every working library should contain every set, (3) that efficiency and economy require that the coöperative finding-list method should be extended to all works which are not to be found in practically every library of 50,000 volumes, (4) that full solution of the problem requires at least one lending copy of each work in each geographical section and very great reduction in the cost of transportation.



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The poverty of American libraries
in the matter of research books.

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